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ABSTRACT

Although children of migrant workers tend to have low educational achievement, there is a surprising lack of data concerning educational challenges faced by handicapped migrant children. It is often a teacher's advocacy that results in a student's enrollment in special education services. This paper describes a Florida program for training special educators as advocates for handicapped migrant children. The training program provides instruction in competencies for teachers serving mild and moderately handicapped migrant students in rural areas, and includes components in other related fields. Course content is divided into three areas of competency development: (1) assessment of academic performance, behavior, and vocational interest; (2) intervention through individualized instruction and transition-to-work plans; and (3) cultural understanding. The effectiveness of the training program is evaluated through Q-sort methodology coupled with frequency data. A list of the training program's 25 competencies is included. (TES)

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A PROGRAM FOR PREPARING TEACHERS TO SERVE HANDICAPPED MIGRANT STUDENTS IN RURAL AREAS

Migrant children face extraordinary social, economic, and educational challenges. Searching for temporary or seasonal employment in agriculture, fishing, or food processing, migrant workers follow the growing seasons across the country. Migrant workers are usually paid on a piecework basis and most have annual incomes well below the national poverty level (Chin, 1984). Babies born to migrant workers suffer a 25% higher infant mortality rate than the general population and malnutrition among migrant children is 10 times higher than the national rate (Florida Impact, 1983).

Estimates on the number of children who work with their families harvesting crops across America range from 800,000 (Florida Impact, 1983) to more than one million (Malone, 1979). Migrant children have been called the most educationally disadvantaged group of youngsters in the United States (Laughlin, 1980). Below average academic achievement has been found to characterize the educational profiles of approximately 8090 of the migrant students studied (Hinojosa & Miller, 1984; Johnson, 1985; Piaz, 1985; Springstead, 1981). Cardenas (1976) reported that at least 20% of the migrant students he studied had never started school. This finding is supported by Chin (1984) who noted that often, migrant children work in the fields rather than attend school in order to contribute to the family income.

According to the President's Commission on Mental Health (1978), the average child of non-farm working parents has a 96% chance of entering the ninth grade and an 80% chance of entering the twelfth grade. In comparison, the child of a migrant farm worker has only a 40% chance of entering the ninth grade and an 11% chance of entering grade twelve. Rollason (1985) and Ogletree and Janick (1982) report that approximately 90% of the migrant students they studied failed to finish high school. Predictors of drop out behavior among individuals in the general population characterize the migrant child's social and academic experience. Compounding the negative influences of low income, large family size, less educated parents, minority status, and school failure is the migrant life style with its continuous disruptions in schooling and resultant loss of instruction time (Garza, 1982).

Mobility has been identified as the dominant influence on the migrant child's school achievement with lower achieving migrant students being found to have been more mobile than their higher achieving counterparts (Chin, 1984; Interstate Migrant

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Education Council, 1985; New York State Education Department, 1968; Plato, 1984). As reported by Nelken and Gallo (1978), migrant students indicated that the frequent moving adversely affected their relationships with potential friends and made it difficult to keep current with school requirements.

Handicapped migrant students face even more significant educational challenges. A surprising lack of data concerning these individuals is indicative of the failure to identify and serve migrant students in need of special education. Barresi (1982) points out four possible explanations to account for the failure to identify the special education needs of migrant students. These include:

1. Many migrant handicapped children are never enrolled in school or are allowed to drop out early by their parents.
2. Teachers do not become familiar with the migrant child's needs.
3. Once mobile handicapped children are referred for assessment, they may move before the process is completed.
4. The culture and language of some migrant students may cause difficulties in accurate diagnosis.

Further barriers impede special education service delivery to migrant students if and when these individuals are identified. Major areas of difficulty are school record transfer and compatibility, interstate discrepancies in special education eligibilty requirements, and limited program options (Barressi, 1982; Hunter & Perry, 1980). Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, & Deno (1983) report that typically it is the persistence of a teacher that results in a student receiving special education services. A substantial need exists for trained special educators to assume advocacy roles in ensuring that migrant students with handicaps receive the education to which they are legally entitled. The following training program is designed to address this need.

Method

Project Participants

Participants selected for the project are required to have a bachelor's degree in education, work in a rural area of central Florida, and teach migrant students who are mild to moderately handicapped. Thirty teachers, representing pre-school through the secondary grades are included in the program. The majority of participants work within one of two counties in west central Florida. Both counties have a large migrant population for harvesting strawberries and citrus.

Participants are recruited by contacting directors of special education, directors and coordinators of migrant education, and principals of schools located in rural areas having large migrant populations. In addition, project staff work with program staff from university departments including special education, ESL-multi cultures, and anthropology, to disseminate information and recruit perspective participants into the program.

Course of Study

The training program is designed to provide instruction in the needed competencies for effectively serving mild and moderately handicapped migrant students in varying exceptionalities. The program, therefore, consists of courses required for state certification in varying exceptionalities, which are modified to include competencies in migrant education. The participants are required to take the modified special education courses in addition to courses in related areas that enhance their knowledge and effectiveness regarding the target population. Besides academic courses, participants are required to complete a 3 hour practicum experience in their own job setting under the supervision of a member of the project staff.

The special education courses are delivered at off campus sites to better serve teachers in rural areas. One course per semester is delivered in each of the counties with classes meeting one evening per week.

Course Content

The course content is designed to meet the specific needs of handicapped migrant students in rural areas. This population receives little attention in the literature and few programs address issues related to curriculum development for migrant handicapped students (Salend, Michael, & Taylor, 1984). The project, therefore, includes competencies having high face validity as well as other competencies that are being tested through field based research.

Course content is divided into three areas of competency development including; assessment, intervention, and cultural understanding. A discussion of each of these areas provides the reader with an understanding of the rationale for the content as well as the modifications needed to make the content appropriate to the migrant rural handicapped population.

Assessment. Assessment is critical to the academic instruction and vocational development of each handicapped student. This statement is especially applicable to handicapped migrant students. These students spend less time in school than do their non migrant counterparts and thus time spent in instruction is particularly critical. Teachers must assess academic performance quickly and accurately so students can be placed at the appropriate instructional level with minimal loss of instructional time. Toward this end, teachers are provided skills in curriculum based assessment, behavioral assessment, criterion referenced testing, and vocational interest inventories. Use of curriculum based assessment and strategies in precision teaching, provides the teachers with skills for monitoring student progress daily. This enables the teachers to assure the appropriateness of the academic skills as well as determine the needed modifications in instruction.

Teachers are also provided skills regarding the use of the Migrant Record Transfer System (MRTS). The MRTS contains a list of curriculum areas for which instruction is provided and is

also used to track migrant students as they move from school to school. It provides an excellent means for transferring valuable information, which may be used at the receiving school of the handicapped migrant student. This information enables the receiving teacher to quickly place the student in material relevant to his or her academic ability and the student avoids the frustration of endless re-evaluations.

Intervention. The relevance of individualized instruction, adaptation of instruction, and modification of materials is necessary in all programming for mild to moderately handicapped individuals (Polloway, Patton, Payne, & Payne, 1989). The teachers are instructed to utilize each of these skill areas and to incorporate them into each students daily plan.

Transition is also important to the success of each handicapped student. The teachers are taught how to effectively utilize the essential components of transition including; job seeking, job retention, personal adjustment, utilization of community resources that provide service to the handicapped, and identification of funding sources that support training for handicapped migrant students. These skills provide the teachers with ability to assist students in obtaining future training or for entering the work force.

Cultural understanding. Because the majority of the teachers are middle class Caucasians with little training in the Hispanic culture (which constitutes the majority of the migrant students in central Florida), teacher trainees are provided a six hour training module. This module provides the teachers with an historical perspective of the migrant population, portrayal of the living and working conditions of migrant families, awareness activities, and customs and mores of the Hispanic culture.

Competencies

Twenty five competencies are included in the rural migrant program. These competencies are listed below.

1. Develop IEP's for migrant handicapped students.
2. Maintain performance records of migrant handicapped students.
3. Monitor instructional programs in all training areas.
4. Consult with other teachers regarding instructional strategies and materials for enhancing academic performance.
5. Reinforce migrant handicapped students for positive academic behavior.
6. Adapt or construct materials for use with migrant handicapped students.
7. Adjust instructional programs based on feedback information.
8. Organize classroom for maximizing learning by considering schedules, seating arrangements, and learning activity centers.
9. Use task analysis for identifying the sequence of instruction.

10. Participate in transition programming activities (e.g. from school to vocational training or employment).
11. Implement career educational activities relevant to the migrant handicapped student.
12. Provide feedback to the handicapped migrant student regarding changes in performance.
13. Provide instructional strategies for integrating the handicapped migrant student with nonhandicapped students.
14. Implement strategies for managing conduct behavior of migrant handicapped students.
15. Adjust strategies for managing behavior based on feedback information.
16. Reinforce migrant handicapped students for positive social behavior.
17. Assess academic performance of the migrant handicapped student.
18. Assist parents in effectively working with their own migrant handicapped children.
19. Facilitate interaction with community agencies that provide services to migrant handicapped youth and families.
20. Explain the legal, medical, and educational terms regarding the migrant population.
21. Assist families with the medical and dental needs of migrant children.
22. Participate with the school based assistance team in identifying the needs of the migrant handicapped student.
23. Facilitate the transfer of records of migrant handicapped students.
24. Use the Migrant Student Record Transfer System for monitoring educational programs.
25. Provide other nonhandicapped students with an awareness of the needs of migrant handicapped students.

Program Evaluation

The effectiveness of the training program is evaluated through Q-sort methodology coupled with frequency data. For the first class meeting, the teachers are required to complete a Real Proficiency Q-Sort and an Ideal Proficiency Q-Sort (Joyce & Wienke, 1988). For the real Q-sort, the individual ranks his or her perceived proficiency on the project's 25 training competencies by sorting them into a matrix of boxes arranged in a normal distribution progressing from the "least proficient" to the "most proficient." After completing the real Q-sort, the teachers complete the ideal Q-sort. The directions for the ideal matrix are similar to the real matrix except teachers rate their ideal level of proficiency, as opposed to their real level, for each competency.

The effectiveness of any training program is determined by the generalization of acquired academic knowledge to implementation of the knowledge in the actual classroom setting. Teachers, therefore, are required to keep frequency data regarding which of the 25 competencies they apply in their classroom and the number of times each competency is used. This information is recorded daily by the teacher on a Data Catcher

Form. The Data Catcher lists all 25 competencies, time intervals, and days of the week. The teachers are required to self record for two, half hour intervals per day.

Upon completion of the training program, participants are readministered both Q-sorts. To evaluate the effectiveness of the training program, correlations between the pre and post sorts for each teacher's real and ideal sorts are calculated. The direction and degree of change indicates whether the instruction is effective in changing the real self, the ideal self, or both the real and ideal selves (Joyce, Wellington, Bloom, Wienke, & Platt, 1988). In addition, correlations between the frequency data and the Q-sorts are made to identify the relationship between frequency and changes in the participants' real and ideal proficiencies.

In conclusion, the Handicapped Migrant Student Program is funded through a rural personnel preparation grant under the Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The funds are used for training teachers in competencies regarding handicapped migrant education over a three year period.

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